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**It’s Safe To Come Home**

**March 12, 2017**

**John 3:1-17**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the One who was lifted up for you, Jesus Christ Our Lord, amen.

Just out of curiosity, is John 3:16 is your favorite Bible verse, raise your hand… I thought so… It’s the favorite for many people. It’s a statement of a love so deep and so pure it’s unfathomable. God so loved you that He sent His Only begotten son to die for you and at the same time Jesus willingly went along with the plan. Most of this story focuses on Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the people of Israel. Nicodemus came to pay a visit to Jesus at night, under the cover of darkness because he was afraid of what his peers would think about him if they saw him going to this religious upstart for religious advice. Yet, there was something about this Jesus that Nicodemus wanted to investigate and learn more about. He had apparently seen the miracles Jesus had been doing, or I should say the signs. The miracles are called signs in John’s Gospel. So, Nicodemus was intrigued enough to risk a visit, but only after dark, when nobody was looking… During this nocturnal visit Jesus revealed the greatest truth about God and His Son.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. It is only one sentence. And that sentence contains only twenty-seven words. Yet From this one verse we can find a number of wonderful eternal truths concerning the love of God.

(1) First, for God so loved the world… The Greek word for world (kosmos) has been defined as “the ungodly multitude; the mass of mankind alienated from God.” This is the world this is the Kosmos that God loved. The world that hates God is the World Jesus died to save. I mean, if we could picture in out mind’s eye a pristine world, fresh from the hand of the Creator and uninfected by evil, we could more easily comprehend God's desire to love that world, but a way-ward world which not only failed to recognize its maker (John 1:10), but openly hated God's approach (15:18) would seem a poor choice for love. God's love is not based on our spiritual condition or on our moral standing. It’s not based on our behavior or on our attitude toward God. Rather, God's love for mankind is absolute and it’s unrestricted.

This Love -- this Grace sets God apart from every other god held up by every other world religion. Buddhists follow The Four Nobel Truths (Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the End of Suffering, and the Path the leads to the end of Suffering). It’s not a gift of grace, it’s a reincarnation through works. You will be reincarnated to various levels depending on how good you are. Hindus believe in karma; your actions continually affect the way the world treats you. In other words, there’s nothing that comes to you that’s not set in motion by your actions. The Jewish code of the law says God has requirements, which must be fulfilled for people to be acceptable to him. In Islam God is a God of judgment not a God of love. You live to appease Allah. Only Christianity dares to proclaim God's love as absolute and unrestricted. It’s a love we call grace, and grace is all about God. As Philip Yancey once wrote: “There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. And there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.”

1. God so loved the world.... (2) That he gave..

How did God love us? He loved us by giving, by serving, by sacrificing. He gave. And what are the results of this giving love this sacrificial love? In the old days bankers used large leather-bound ledgers where all accounts were entered by hand. Those ledgers, in a way, remind me of God's ledgers in heaven. We’re told those ledgers will one day be opened. Now picture my name Melvin Robert Musser written in the ledger, and in one column is the sum total of my indebtedness against God. Trust me, I could never pay enough to cancel that overwhelming indebtedness. I suspect I’m not alone… None of us can pay the debt we could never be holy enough. In his letter to the Church in Rome Saint Paul says, “None are righteous, no not one.” (Romans 3:10)

Now picture God taking his pen and transferring the sum total of my indebtedness to the account of the Lord Jesus Christ. And on Jesus' account in the Ledger are the words “Transferred from the account of Melvin Robert Musser.” Now picture one thing further. Picture if you can the total righteousness of Christ and against it these words are written, “Transferred to the account of Melvin Robert Musser.” Not only is your indebtedness fully transferred to Christ, but His total righteousness is fully transferred to you. That’s love… That’s unrestricted love.

(1) God so loved the world... (2) That he gave... (3) His only Son.

Not only was God willing to give, but he was willing to give all that he had, “His only Son.” When you give to someone out of your abundance that’s one thing. That’s how we give. We give of the first fruits, knowing full well there’s more fruit coming. Not so with God. He gave everything, for you.

A child was once trying to quote from John 3:16 in the King James Version, which states, “his only begotten Son.” The child misquoted it and said, “his only forgotten Son.” It was one of those slips of the tongue that carried more truth than we care to admit. Sadly, for far too many people in the world today Jesus Christ is truly forgotten. His life is forgotten... His love is forgotten... His sacrifice is forgotten… By your being here today you are trying to not let Jesus and his love be forgotten. You are living so your life is a witness to his love.

(1) God so loved the world... (2) that he gave... (3) his only Son... (4) that whoever believes in him may not parish...

Jesus didn’t come into the world in order to scold the world. He came to rescue the world, to rescue you, and rescue me. He didn’t come to punish, He came to pardon. He didn’t come to destroy He came to deliver. He came so you would not parish, but receive eternal life. Salvation is God’s action, but how we act impacts those who God places in our lives. Your life can and does make a difference.

We’re called to be a people of reconciliation, a people of forgiveness, a people of Love. Years ago, a young man had quarreled with his father and left home. He continued to keep in touch with his mother, and wanted very badly to come back home for Christmas, but he was afraid his father wouldn’t allow him. His mother wrote to him and urged him to come home, but he didn’t feel he could until he knew his father had forgiven him. Finally, there was no time for any more letters. His mother wrote and said she would talk with his father, and if he had forgiven him, she would tie a white cloth on the tree which grew along the railroad tracks near their home. If there were no white cloth, it would be better if he went on. So, the young man started home. As the train got closer to his home he was so nervous he said to a friend who was traveling with him, “I can't bear to look. Sit in my place and look out the window. I will tell you what the tree looks like and you tell me whether there is a white cloth on it.” So, his friend changed places with him and looked out the window. A few moments later the friend said “Oh yes, I see the tree.” The young man asked, “Is there a white cloth tied to it?” For a moment, the friend didn’t say anything. Then he turned, and in a very gentle voice said, “There’s a white cloth tied to every branch!”

In a way, Jesus is the white cloth our heavenly Father tied to the tree. To the tree -- the cross of Calvary signaling it’s safe for us to come home. What Jesus has done for me overwhelms me. He’s transferred to his ledger my debt. He paid for my sins in full… And He transferred from His ledger all His righteousness granting me eternal life. That is love… That is the Power of Eternal Love.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” May the power of God’s love overwhelm you and give you peace in trusting God’s promise and Jesus’ gift of reconciliation. May we each in turn be a white cloth signaling to everyone we meet that it is indeed safe to come home to God Our Father in Heaven. Amen.